

How Do I Find a Good Church?

Have you ever looked at the amount of churches and asked the question, “Why are there so many? How do I find a good church?” Perhaps you are one of those who has given up on church altogether. But Hebrews 10:12 tells us “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is...” We need to find a good church. So what should I look for? Is it in the name? A skeptic once asked me, “So what brand of Christianity do you follow?” Admittedly, it is confusing, and even discouraging to have so many types of churches. Fortunately, there is a solution. God has described what He expects of a church in His Word. As we examine Scripture, we’ll see what any local church should be. This serves as a guideline.

So what does the Bible have to say about a good church? Well, today we’ll use the idea of family to illustrate. John 1:12 tells us that as believers we are made children of God. Christians are brothers and sisters with God as our Father. This is not just an illustration, it is a spiritual fact, we have been adopted into His family. Now, whenever God uses a human illustration, He does so to illustrate deeper spiritual truths.

The first thing about a family is

1) There must be love.

There must be concern and care between the members. This is not the same as ‘friendliness’. Many people can be ‘friendly’ without loving. Love is a giving of ourselves to each other, a sacrificial love. Jesus said, “by this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another”. A love for one another was the characteristic that Christ singles out as the identifying mark of true Christians. It is the primary mark of a church close to God. Unselfish love. This kind of love is supernatural, it comes from God and is dependent on us being in fellowship with Him. I John 1:7. Peter’s description of the growth of a Christian in 2 Peter 1 culminates in ‘brotherly kindness’ and ‘love’. Clearly, love is the pinnacle of spiritual growth.

The church is not an association to organize common good, it is a body, when one hurts, all are to hurt, when one is happy, all rejoice.

Well the second thing we expect of a family is

2) You must be fed

Now immediately your mind thought of pot lucks and church dinners. That’s not the kind of feeding we’re talking about. We’re talking about the food of the Word, solid Biblical teaching. A good church will have a pastor and teachers who are grounded in the Word and honour it. They love it and declare the Bible as the church’s final authority. They teach the Word without compromise.

Nehemiah 8:8 gives us the kind of preaching we are to have in our churches: “So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading.”

Also, just like a mother doesn’t chew the food for his child, a pastor doesn’t avoid the tough stuff. Hebrews 5 tells us of spiritual infants who couldn’t handle ‘strong meat’ “Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.

¹²For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again

which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. ¹³For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. ¹⁴But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

After the Word is preached, do you feel built up, equipped? Do you know more of the knowledge of God, of His Will? Are you more knowledgeable of the love of God, of His holiness? Have you been more established in the faith? Has there been conviction of sin, and a challenge to change? Has there been instruction in righteousness? Do you have more of a glimpse of heaven, or is it all about feeling good?

Too many churches give out the equivalent of candy floss every Sunday. The preaching is about as deep as one page in your Bible. The members are malnourished, and it's evident by their defeated lives. These churches use psychology, humanism, self-esteem talk, even New Age teaching. In order to disguise the weak nature of the preaching, the emphasis is placed on the singing and the worship, and it all too often boils down to nothing more than emotionalism. “If the feelings were good, then the service was good”. But would you apply that to a literal meal? If the kids felt good about the candy-floss, does that mean they have been nourished?

The third thing about a church family is

3) You must be protected

A normal family protects its members. So in a church family, there needs to be protection from false teaching. It would not be a loving family that allowed its children to wander out as they please and to experiment with every danger around the corner. No! They should be warned about the dangers, told what is wrong! So a good church warns its members of the false teaching that abounds today. “Oh, that's divisive and unloving!” No, that's Biblical. The entire book of Jude is devoted to the topic of false teachers, so is much of 2 Peter. 1 & 2 Timothy also majors on ‘shunning profane and vain babblings’ in ‘instructing them that oppose themselves’ and many other such exhortations regarding false teaching and true doctrine. A good church will warn its members regarding the cults and false teaching abounding. It has a love for truth, not for inoffensiveness. The same is true of any good family.

The fourth mark of a good church family is

4) There must be discipline

This seems so obvious in a family, why is it not practiced in a church family? A church family is to hate the cancer of sin and seek to stop it spreading in the body. To see a brother or sister caught up in compromise or a repetitive sin and overlook it is selfish. It means I am more concerned with myself, how will they perceive me if I rebuke them, or how will I feel if they rebut me? But Galatians 6:1 is a command: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” We are called to do it not because we are

better, but because we are part of the same body. We are to “esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3) Discipline is something seldom done in today’s churches because churches families are beginning to resemble the breakdown in physical families. Children tell parent what to do. Children refuse discipline and even sue their parents. Today, no one submits to authority. When faced with church discipline, people just leave, as if they are simply leaving one school to find a better one. We know that church discipline is to be done in love. All too often, the unloving reaction comes from the one being disciplined, not those exercising it.

So, the church is a family. Families love. They feed. They protect. They discipline. This is true of the family of God. A church that has genuine sacrificial love between the members, that preaches the Word uncompromisingly, that protects the members from false teaching, and that exercises church discipline is probably a healthy local assembly.